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The film, "The Bandits of Orgosolo," illustrates how environment inexorably shapes the lives of individuals. Michele, a poor Sardinian shepherd falsely accused of aiding bandits, flees from the police with his younger brother and the herd of sheep that supports them. By the time they finally reach safety, the entire flock has died from exhaustion, and Michele is compelled to steal to preserve himself and his brother. Thus, he is forced by circumstances beyond his control to become the criminal he was earlier accused of being. Although presenting the harsh economic realities of the shepherds' lives, this film avoids the sentimentality of such similar films as "How Green Was My Valley" and thereby gains in power. If a teacher wants his students exposed to the crushing effect of environment on the individual so that they can better comprehend the effect of the ghetto on its inhabitants, for example, this film conveys the message. (LH)

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The Bandits of Orgosolo

A very un-idyllic tale which penetrates the conventional romance of "simple shepherd folk."

by Frank McLaughlin

The Bandits of Orgosolo (b/w, 98 minutes) Written, directed and photographed by Vittorio De Seta. With Michele Cossu, Peppeddu Coccu and Vittorina Pisano. (1961) Distributed by Contemporary Films, Inc., 267 West 25th St., New York 10001. Apply for rates. Infocard 95

COMBINE A DIRECTOR with great technical skill and a strong social consciousness and the motion picture medium with its superlative capacity for conveying environment and you have a masterpiece. The very texture of reality results from such a mixture. This is the achievement of *The Bandits of Orgosolo,* a little known Italian film written, directed and photographed by Vittorio DeSeta.

In his first feature film, DeSeta tells the story of a poor Sardinian shepherd who is driven by unfortunate circumstances to banditry. The 98 minute film opens with Michele, the central character, and his young brother tending their sheep. Their primitive camp is happened upon by bandits with a wounded companion who are fleeing the carabinieri. When the police are spotted, the bandits flee. In the ensuing chase, one of the policemen is killed and Michele is unjustly accused of being an accomplice.

The next section (the majority of the film's footage) is devoted to the efforts of Michele and his brother with their herd of sheep trying to elude the police. The quiet competence and unquestioning devotion of Michele's young brother adds to this segment's fascination. They finally reach safety only to have their entire flock die from the exhausting pace. Michele, now without means of supporting himself and his family, turns to crime. The film ends after he has overpowered a poor shepherd, much like himself, and stolen his sheep.

What transforms this simple story into a parable with a relevant message for all times is DeSeta's masterful use of the peasants of Orgosolo as actors and his sensitive camera work. Carefully combined shots capture the scrub vegetation and the rock-strewn, barrenness of the land. If the film had been shot in color this could not have been accomplished because the landscape would have been given a romanticized rugged beauty. Nature is not bountiful, but a tough uncompromising master. The inhabitants of Orgosolo are dour, rock-hard as the land itself. Jona Mann, a *Media and Methods* contributor (November, 1966) marks the relationship between nature and the uncomplaining peasants:

> The men who survive in such an environment and whose hands (in close-ups) are skilled, sure and strong—hands that work with guns, knives, animals and firewood, are men whose fire-lit faces match their hard hands. DeSeta's actors are a somber, inarticulate, clannish people resigned to stubbornly squeezing a livelihood from a stubborn land. There is little pleasure; even childhood is heavy with the responsibilties of adulthood. Nature's mark is visible on all it supports.

The texture of the shepherd's lives is fleshed out by the interaction between the arid landscape and the nearly inscrutable peasants. The underlying message of *Bandits* lies in this interaction. Essentially, the wild, desolate nature of Orgosolo determines the hard, gruelling lives of its inhabitants. There is a mythic quality to Michele's tragedy. One senses this drama has been re-enacted for decades, even centuries. No one smiles in the film; years of relentless struggle have reduced lives to exercises in silent subsistence.

The Marxian implications of DeSeta's film are obvious —the cruel economic realities of life have etched themselves into the very consciousness of the shepherds. *Bandits* is reminiscent of those old films and novels about the brutalized lives of Welsh miners. But, it transcends them because there is not an ounce of sentimentality in the film as there often was in works such as *How Green Was My Valley.*

When the film ends with Michele and his stolen sheep disappearing into the mountainous terrain, a profound message has been eloquently communicated, and it puts to shame those sadly superficial "crime does not pay," "the gangsters-get-their-comeuppance" endings of most American films. Students will understand what has transpired! And what is more important, when a white middle-class American teacher turns his students to face the poverty and despair-ridden lives of Negroes crushed in urban ghettos, they will begin to understand why so many Negroes have tired of the aspirin-and-hot tea approach of naive white liberals.

If an English or social studies teacher wants his students exposed to how an environment inexorably shapes its inhabitants, no more artistically honest film can be found than *The Bandits of Orgosolo.*